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ART. VI.—THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN ENGLAND.

WRITERS on political topics frequently assert, by way of preface, that a momentous crisis has just been reached in the affairs of which they are treating, which frequently means little more than an indirect advertisement of the interest of their subject-matter. Perhaps, however, we may venture without offence to apply this well-worn phrase to English politics.

It is at least the general opinion that we are witnessing the beginning of a peaceful revolution in England, which will unsettle many of the firmest foundations of the established order of things. A singularly rapid change has taken place from the old placid conviction that whatever was was right, to an unquiet foreboding that everything, right or wrong, will have to be upset. The change was simultaneous with the death of Lord Palmerston, and was hastened by that event, though primarily due to far deeper causes. In the halcyon days of that fortunate ruler, all went smoothly. The suffrage question had been shelved by tacit consent, after a few perfunctory discussions to soothe the restless spirit of Lord Russell. Nobody cared much for reforming anything. Year after year, Mr. Gladstone came down to the House of Commons, and made a grand rhetorical display upon the budget. With a fluent eloquence which could render even five hours of statistics entertaining, he repeated variations upon the same old tune. Reduction of taxation coincided with a steady increase of revenue, due to the rapid development of the commercial resources of the country. England was passing smoothly to a financial millennium, in which the last fetters should be removed from perfect freedom of trade, and in which even a dim prospect of paying off the national debt might become visible. The one source of discomfort perceptible was the possibility that in a few centuries the coal-fields might be exhausted, and the manufacturing supremacy of the country destroyed. But a respite of a few centuries is enough to calm most people's minds, and the country was waxing fat and slumbering.

When, however, Lord Palmerston died, it became necessary for the liberal party to propose a certain extension of the

suffrage, by way of redeeming election pledges. But such pledges sit pretty lightly upon the souls of politicians ; and it was thought by many persons, and not unnaturally, that they would be redeemed as easily as on several previous occasions, that is, by simply renewing the promise to do something indefinite at some indefinite time. The bill proposed by Mr. Gladstone was moderate enough to give countenance to such suspicions ; it was long before people believed that the party had made up their minds to anything more than a sham fight.

The most curious illustration of the views then prevalent is to be found in the arguments by which the bill was supported and encountered in the session of 1866. No one took the ground that the classes excluded from the franchise suffered any serious evils in consequence, nor that the administration of the government required any particular improvement. In an argument which was frequently quoted as the “flesh-and-blood argument,” and, we may add, singularly misrepresented, Mr. Gladstone accused the conservatives of forgetting that the working classes were of their own flesh and blood. He proposed, in substance, to admit a few workmen to the suffrage, because, after all, they were very good fellows, often very intelligent, and very little inclined to mischief. He would ask a select party of them indoors, because it would please them, and would not hurt the present occupants. They would soon fall into the ways of the establishment, and indeed were often quite presentable already. There was not the least fear, if the number admitted was moderate, that they would be breaking the furniture or committing any impropriety ; and it was a great pity to hold out for the exclusion of such decent persons, when we could safely pay them the compliment of ostensibly participating in the management of the nation. In short, the reformers, with few exceptions, not only did not urge the probability that the new constituents would introduce changes into the constitution, but argued expressly on the ground that the new constituents would be just like the old.

The retort was, of course, obvious, and was put with singular force by Mr. Lowe, the most caustic and vigorous of living parliamentary orators. With little power over the emotions, and taking a rather narrow view of most political questions, no one

can put such pungent sense into such terse English, or bring a theory into more brilliant relief. His speeches in 1866 contained the pith of the whole argument. If everything is working well, he asked, why make a change? If we are to give votes to people because they are our own flesh and blood, where are we to stop? Utterly rejecting the doctrine of abstract rights, he took the plain utilitarian ground. The House of Commons, he said, with great variety of emphasis, was the wisest, most liberal assembly, the one which had been most fertile in great men and productive of great measures, of any bodies known to history; and it had been greatest since the Reform Bill of 1832. Why should we rashly tamper with this grand historical assembly, and plunge into a course which, to sum up all evils in one significant word, would infallibly “Americanize” our institutions?

Of this argument several things might be said,—as, that an inference drawn from the absolute perfection of the House of Commons was well adapted to find favor at least with the House of Commons. Yet, we might add, it required rather an effort to accept the belief that all the strange compromises by which history is made in England had resulted in turning out a body of faultless and ideal perfection; that, for example, the line which divided the franchised from the disfranchised, as they occupied a house valued at above or below ten pounds annually, should by some strange felicity be exactly the line which gave the maximum of political wisdom to the elected body. What magic could there be in those precise figures, one might ask, and what mysterious mode of calculation beyond the well-known rule of thumb had determined their selection? The point, however, which we would now remark is, that the whole logical superstructure was raised upon the fundamental assumption that the House of Commons was as perfect a body as the frailty of human nature could permit, and that even the liberal members failed for a time to dispute this assumption with any vigor. They argued, at most, that the constitution would be strengthened by widening its basis, but they denied that it would be materially altered. The challenge, however, once thrown out, was speedily accepted. Mr. Lowe has the unlucky faculty of being too luminous; he makes his points so clearly that their weakness becomes as plain as their strength.

He did more than any one else to excite the reform enthusiasm amongst the lower orders, by dilating, as it was thought, insultingly upon the vices of the still unenfranchised classes ; and he provoked some inquiry amongst thinking men into the perfections of the idol before which they were invited to fall down and worship. The reform discussions set people reflecting upon the vaunted merits of this superlative assembly ; and the conclusions at which they generally arrived may be inferred from the subsequent course of events.

In the singular session of 1867, Mr. Disraeli succeeded in carrying through the House of Commons, as leader of the conservative party, a measure far more democratic than his opponents had demanded, and which was said to be rather startling even to so stanch a radical as Mr. Bright. We need not attempt a full explanation of this singular phenomenon. The government, it has been said, were frightened into reform by Mr. Beales and his radical followers ; the victory was really won when the London rioters pulled down the railings of Hyde Park. When the Home Secretary could find no answer but tears to the announcement that the mob meant to break the law, it was all up with the British constitution. The confession would be humiliating, if true ; for no political position was ever yielded to so feeble an assault. In spite of the most industrious blowing of trumpets by the agitators, the excitement was never of that ominous kind which precedes a revolution and may force timely concessions from a wise statesman. There were few symptoms of the exasperation which threatened civil war in 1832. Brave men might at least have made a stand ; but our conservative legislators went more than half-way, and fairly outbid their opponents in their own market. We should be slow to admit that any English statesmen could be so easily startled out of their convictions as to become the tools of their extreme opposites at the bidding of a single mob. Neither is it possible to believe, in spite of all that has been said of Mr. Disraeli's amazing cleverness, that they were simply tricked into concession. English country gentlemen, like some other classes of mankind, are often stupid enough ; they may follow a political leader blindly ; they may, as Mr. Lowe put it, be brought gradually up to an object

like a skittish horse, till they are accustomed to sights at which they originally shied ; but, with all respect for Mr. Disraeli's skill as a political Rarey, we cannot believe that he had so completely tamed his really high-spirited followers as to invert their natural instincts. The dullest of country gentlemen knew that household suffrage was the real old democratic scarecrow which he had been dreading for years past, however prettily Mr. Disraeli might describe it in the loveliest constitutional phrases. Even the premier's eloquence could not really convince them that " shooting Niagara " meant nothing more than a quiet sail down the Thames. And yet the whole party, with the exception of the very small body represented by Lord Salisbury, took the plunge as calmly as if they had been carrying out their most cherished wishes. If the people of the Southern States were to claim negro suffrage as the natural development of their policy, the logical feat would not be much stranger. And it is impossible to set down so singular a transformation to any skilful process of political hoodwinking. If, indeed, the eyes of the party had really been shut, there was no want of eloquent appeals from the few faithful, and of bitter taunts from gratified opponents, which might well have revealed the truth.

The fact is, that the party were neither tricked nor frightened,—or, rather, neither fear nor deception was the main cause of their amazing conversion. They had, as Mr. Disraeli said, with some excess of candor, been " educated," and the educating agency was not, as he modestly suggested, Mr. Disraeli himself, but that vague power known as public opinion. A great change, at which we have already hinted, had been wrought by some means or other. As a rule, the conservative party would feel that in resisting sweeping reforms they would have behind them a strong popular sentiment. If beaten in any encounter, they would fall back upon a good solid support in the general instinct which dreads revolution. Under ordinary circumstances, that instinct is perhaps the strongest, and is certainly a very strong, power in the country. Even in the keen agitations which brought about the old Reform Bill, or Roman Catholic emancipation, or the repeal of the Corn Laws, it enabled the conservative party to make a stubborn fight. When Sir Robert Peel, in the last of these cases, betrayed, as they

held, the great mass of his party, he could carry with him only a small number of followers, and the remainder made a dogged and protracted, though a hopeless, resistance. But in 1867 the case was inverted. The few remained faithful, the bulk of the party deserted its colors. And the circumstance which made such a result possible was, that, for once, the public opinion of the intelligent classes was strongly in favor of some decided action. The presumption which is usually in favor of the established order was now as decidedly against it. The cry of the great majority was not, "Stand still till we see our way plainly," but, "For God's sake, move on some way or other; we have been standing still quite long enough." There was a prevailing feeling that many reforms were required; and even those who disliked an extension of the suffrage were anxious to get the question settled — though the details of the settlement might not quite please them — in order to clear the way for further action. Mr. Lowe's argument from the absolute perfection of the House of Commons had so completely lost its efficacy, that the general feeling was rather that any change would be for the better, than that no change could possibly improve the constitution of the country.

John Bull, it is generally supposed, is a tolerably self-satisfied old gentleman. He has a profound contempt for that large class of two-legged animals which he describes summarily as foreigners or natives: the natives representing the more dark-colored varieties; and the foreigners, those who affect a certain semblance of civilization. And doubtless he possesses a vast fund of self-complacency, which is not the least evident in his moments of self-depreciation. His proverbial phrase, that they manage things better in France, implies a rooted conviction, that, however well they manage things, they are Frenchmen for all that. Yet he does depreciate himself at times with surprising vigor and success. For some time past he has been in one of these fits. He has found no names bad enough to throw at some of his pet objects of veneration. As a savage will sometimes thrash his favorite idol for not bringing him luck, John Bull has been heartily belaboring things of which in his ordinary state he is more inclined to brag. For a time, even the old commonplaces about the blessings of a free press

and of parliamentary government have been distasteful to him. He has cast longing eyes at the superior organization of the great military despotisms of the Continent. He has been astonished to find in how many things he has been sticking to old-fashioned methods, in spite of the development abroad of modern ideas. As one example, the manufacturing pre-eminence, on which he specially prided himself, has been passing from him, if we are to believe his cries of lamentation. The ironmasters of Belgium have, he declares, been beating Sheffield and Birmingham; the foreign markets of which England formerly had a monopoly are beginning to be supplied entirely from native sources; and one reason assigned is, that there has been a relative decline in skill and intelligence on the part of English manufacturers. The foreigners are taking the lead, because they have had the wise foresight to educate their industrial classes sufficiently to take advantage of all modern scientific results, whilst the same classes in England have been carelessly left in ignorance and semi-barbarism. The remedy suggested is, that government should take a more active part in supplying the education in which private enterprise has signally failed.

The lamentation is taken up in many other quarters, till the whole country seems to have developed a novel taste for sackcloth and ashes. Mr. Carlyle's prophet-like denunciations of anarchy, cant, and misrule, for once found an echo in the hearts of his countrymen. Mr. Matthew Arnold more delicately insinuates his very low opinion of his native land. Englishmen could not read without considerable irritation such a paper as that which in the *Cornhill* professed to report "what foreigners say of us." It was irritating, because the writer appeared to record with unmitigated complacency censures in which he should have felt himself more personally interested. A man who is compelled to expose the gross errors of his own country should do it with some little air of vexation, rather than of jaunty self-satisfaction. Criticism, too, is always more irritating in proportion to the serene self-content of the critic. Yet most persons felt that there was much truth in Mr. Arnold's remarks, if perhaps they were rather half than whole truths. He had hit some real blots, and if his blows were not

of the coarse, knock-down variety, they were certainly stinging. The opinions which he expressed have become widely prevalent within the last two years, and are associated with very different forms of sentiment. The ordinary cynic of the respectable British press turns his satire rather against established institutions than against reformers. He thinks, indeed, that all enthusiasm is stupid and coarse and misdirected; and he doubts very much whether fanatics, that is, people who believe in anything, will make matters better than they find them; still he thinks that the existing edifice is thoroughly rotten, though it may possibly be replaced by something worse. Gentlemen of Mr. Matthew Arnold's school have a serene conviction, that, by a process which they describe as the "free play of consciousness," the country will gradually be purged of its silly, old-fashioned, feudal notions, and reorganized in humble imitation of France or Prussia. Those thorough-going radicals, especially the disciples of M. Comte, who are a vigorous, if not a numerous body, look forward to something like a revolutionary era, to the rapid substitution of a more rational faith for an effete Christianity, and to a thorough reconstruction of society from its bases; all which can hardly be effected without some little trouble. In various tones, according to the varying temperaments and party associations of the speakers, there is a loud and general demand for some very decided changes. When the atmosphere is in so unsettled a condition, and the conservative party has given so startling a proof of its want of cohesion and persistency, it is natural to look out for storms. We need not attempt the dangerous task of political prediction, so far as to indicate with any confidence the directions in which disturbance may be expected. In the uncertainties of party warfare, the struggle may take place where it is least anticipated. But it is easy to point out certain great questions which must before long come up for solution; though the order in which they will arise, and the nature of the solutions which will be obtained, must be matters of very uncertain speculation. The changes brought about by the Reform Bill have already disappointed some confident predictions; but it is scarcely possible to mistake the general direction of the impending alterations.

Some light would perhaps be thrown upon the precise nature of the prevalent discontent, if we were able to examine the causes by which it has been generated and the mode in which it affects existing party combinations. We can only attempt to indicate one or two obvious considerations upon these points.

During the drowsy Palmerstonian epoch, English eyes were directed with more than usual interest towards foreign countries. With few exciting discussions at home, Englishmen naturally watched the course of events in Europe and America. The American War in particular excited most vehement party feeling, and the suppression of the Rebellion undoubtedly gave additional courage to the followers of Mr. Bright. The Danish War again made Englishmen ask with some anxiety whether their prestige had not singularly decayed upon the Continent. But the most remarkable influence was exercised somewhat later by the German War of 1866. English newspapers, with their usual want of appreciation of foreign affairs, had regarded the approaching quarrel with contemptuous indifference. It was, they thought, a squabble between two highwaymen over their plunder; it was a pity that the good heavy Germans should be blowing each other to atoms, and spending so much excellent money on cannon and gunpowder; but no principles were involved, and no sympathy was due to either party. The Battle of Sadowa struck them like an electric shock. It was not merely that they recognized — somewhat late — the enormous importance of the issues involved; they were startled still more at the strength exhibited by the victors. The readiness with which a huge army was placed in the field, the perfection of its organization, the skill with which it was commanded, the excellent material of which it was composed, all gave rise to some unpleasant reflections. Prussia had placed itself at a bound in the leading position of the European family of nations; and Englishmen asked with a certain amazement, what were the principles to which this singular success was owing. A state comparatively poor in resources and in population had at short notice made a military effort surpassing anything that Englishmen could hope to do. If with great efforts and at enormous expense England could have landed upon the Continent a force equal to one of

the divisions of the Prussian army, it would have done well ; and then its officers would have been men who looked upon their profession as a gentlemanlike amusement for an amateur, and its rank and file would have been picked up from the dregs of the population. The Crimean disasters had been ominous enough at the time ; but could any one say that a repetition of Crimean horrors had been made impossible or improbable ? The mere fact that almost every Prussian private could read and write gave cause for thought ; and in short it was felt, that, considered as a piece of machinery, the Prussian army was as much above an English army as the rifle above the old “ brown Bess.” The material might be no better, or, as Englishmen naturally believe, it might even be less endowed by Nature with warlike qualities ; but in its finished form it showed care, forethought, and a full command of all the results of modern science, instead of the happy-go-lucky confidence in good-fortune and British pluck, characteristic of its English counterpart. England, it is true, had never seriously entered into competition in such matters with the great military powers ; and Englishmen might remember that there were certain little inconveniences attached to excessive developments in that direction. But they would wish that their army, though numerically small, should at least be in as efficient a state as the most lavish expenditure could secure, and that their energies should not be crippled by the sheer stupidity of red tape and routine. And more than this, the perfection of the Prussian army was taken to indicate a corresponding excellence in other administrative matters. In France, the success of Prussia led to proposals for sweeping military reforms ; in England, the military point of view was almost sunk in wider conclusions as to the backwardness and old-fashioned principle which governed the majority of her institutions. To mention nothing else, the inefficiency of the whole educational system, especially of the schools intended for the middle classes, as compared with similar arrangements in Prussia, suddenly became a commonplace of remark. If the energy with which a nation can strike a military blow is not a very accurate measure of its degree of civilization, it is at least a very impressive one to the popular imagination ; and the Battle of Sadowa, whilst breaking up the existing balance of power in

Germany, did much by its mere echo to upset the equilibrium of English politics.

The weakness thus revealed to British eyes, the only question could be, at what point to begin, — What part of the house shall be first set in order? The extension of the suffrage, regarded at first as a harmless concession to certain vague popular desires, had become a bold democratic measure; and a democratic *régime*, whatever its merits or defects, might at least be expected to make a clean sweep of much of the old-fashioned lumber dear to the British middle classes. The vested interests, which are so amazingly powerful in English politics, would find themselves in presence of a new power scarcely inclined to treat them with the old superstitious reverence. It was hoped by some, that, in the Parliamentary session of 1868, the expiring body would do what it could to employ its last moments profitably, and leave some legacy of genuine reform to its successors. Owing to various causes, these expectations have been disappointed. The session was one long wrangle over a single topic, leading to no practical result, unless that it pledged the liberal party to carry out a certain line of policy. The Irish Church will have the precedence over other objects of attack; and, desirable as it is that that grievance should be thoroughly dealt with, it is permissible to regret that so much precious time has been wasted in merely, as it were, tracing the parallels in preparation for a future assault. Much work was neglected which might have had a more direct, though a less conspicuous, influence upon the welfare of the country.

This waste of time has of course been attributed to an unworthy desire for power on the part of rival leaders. This is a very safe taunt to hurl at any party, for it is a necessity of political warfare that the leaders should desire office, both on selfish and on patriotic grounds: no human being can profess to say which class of motives is predominant. It is, however, characteristic of the present position, that the leaders of both the great parties are men profoundly distrusted by their followers. This is, indeed, the natural result of a warfare in which new issues are being continually presented. Men see dimly that great problems will arise; and they cannot see in

what position they will find the chief actors in the struggle. Thus, it is common for Liberals to accuse Mr. Disraeli of dishonesty. A Tory leader who has carried the most democratic measure of the century is, indeed, in an equivocal position. A calmer observation will perhaps suggest that Mr. Disraeli is far too clever a man to be dishonest. He has so great a facility in inventing new theories, that he need never fall back upon the coarse expedient of abandoning his opinions; he only gives them a new interpretation; and we have every reason to think that his imagination is mobile and lively enough to make him believe in every successive application of his elastic doctrines. Thus, for example, Mr. Disraeli has always had a gift for demonstrating that his opponents are the supporters of the "Venetian" or aristocratic theory, and that Toryism is the true democracy. Words so stretched and tortured may have little value to others; yet words may provide a decent screen under which he can take what to blinder understandings seems to be an entirely new view of things. Whether he admits thousands of new voters in the name of old Tory principles, or as a convert to radicalism, makes very little difference,—because their votes will be precisely the same, whether their tickets of admission be printed in the colors of the Tories or of the Whigs; but the difference in terms probably saves Mr. Disraeli's reputation to himself, though it only bewilders his followers. We should imagine, though it matters little to any one but himself, that Mr. Disraeli probably valued the enunciation of abstract principles as a very useful gilding to political speeches, and, as he has a great taste for tinsel of all kinds, that he really believed the gilding to be as important as the substance; and meanwhile he is able to reconcile with his oratorical flourishes a very keen insight into practical utilities. He probably saw that something must be done about reform, and was thoroughly resolved to be the man to do it; but he sincerely thought, also, that the use of constitutional terms in introducing a sweeping change would act as a sanctifying charm to the means employed. The result, however, of this extreme cleverness upon the confidence of his party is the same as that of actual insincerity. It is a tenable speculation, that Mr. Disraeli may be the man to disestablish the Irish Church in the name of the British

Constitution. Yet, however much the genuine Tory may prefer such stalwart conservatives as Mr. Gathorne Hardy, who rushes right against reforms like a bull against a red rag, Mr. Disraeli, with all his shiftiness, is a necessity to his followers from sheer superiority of talent.

Mr. Gladstone, if his sincerity is less doubtful, is a leader equally trying. It is not merely that a certain intolerance and heat of temper make him forgetful of expediency, that he attacks Mr. Disraeli so unsparingly and incessantly that his blows are occasionally struck wildly and at random, and that a superfluity of moral indignation is apt to incumber a man in party struggles. It is not merely that he is a bad tactician, but that no one can feel quite certain of his principles. He has been slowly developing from a High-Church Tory to a thorough-going radical; but whilst some of his early principles have been frankly abandoned, others have a strange way of cropping up in singular company when least expected. Especially is this the case in regard to his views upon Church matters, and Church matters must before long be amongst the leading topics of English parties. For example, a question, of minor importance in itself, yet of great interest to reformers, has been for some time the admission of Dissenters to the Universities. Mr. Gladstone, as the former representative of Oxford, was, of course, entitled to speak with special authority upon this topic. Yet he has continued to split hairs about it, to draw back after advancing, to change and to hesitate, until no one can define his exact position. He has drawn lines as to the exact degree of privilege which he would concede to Dissenters long after it has become obvious to every one that no privileges can be denied to them, and has tried to avoid responsibility by refraining from voting or speaking upon simple issues. His party will probably drag him after them, in the end; but a leader who has to be dragged by his party is a leader of a very anomalous kind.

There are, of course, many men in Parliament, perhaps as many as ever, of genuine ability and unmistakable honesty. No one can take a more straightforward line than Mr. Bright, or defend it with more ability; but, much as his position has lately improved, he has too little sympathy with the govern-

ing class to be accepted as a leader by any large party ; and, indeed, it is possible, that, even in a more democratic assembly, he may be found to represent too accurately the prejudices of the middle classes. Meanwhile, to mention no other names, it is obvious that the two great parties each distrust their leaders and distrust themselves. If the extension of the suffrage could have been voted upon by ballot, it is probable that barely a hundred votes would have been recorded in its favor. The "cave" which was formed by Mr. Lowe in the liberal party, and the small body of faithful represented by Lord Salisbury, probably expressed the genuine opinions of five sixths of their respective parties ; and Parliament has, somehow, found itself landed in a democratic conclusion without having been in the least convinced of its truth. Distrust of leaders, and a general chaos of political opinion, are only the natural symptom of such a removal of the old party lines.

It was not surprising, though it may be regretted, that the political struggle of 1868 took the turn of which we have spoken. The Irish difficulty is the standing opprobrium of English statesmen ; and the Irish Church is the most conspicuous, if not the most deeply seated, evil that remains to be eradicated. The land question was far too vast to be tackled in a single session. Mr. Mill's revolutionary plan of confiscation, whatever may be thought of its merits, was altogether in advance of the general feeling. One might as well ask a convocation of the clergy to proclaim M. Comte their spiritual teacher, as a parliament of landholders to upset all existing rights in land. Nor was there any well-considered scheme of a more moderate kind which could possibly be discussed within the time. The Church grievance, on the contrary, gave a distinct issue, on which all liberals of every shade were united, and in which a tangible result might be anticipated. It is not our intention to discuss the policy by which Mr. Disraeli evaded the consequences of defeat, and postponed the decision of the controversy for another year. The question is of more interest as a foreshadowing of the wider contests which must inevitably arise before long in England, and from this point of view perhaps deserves more attentive notice than from the interests immediately involved. That the Irish Church will be abolished

may be taken for certain ; though it is by no means plain, nor perhaps does it so much matter, what will be done with the revenues afterwards.

Mr. Gladstone and many of his supporters made elaborate professions of their loyalty to the Church of England, whilst eager to destroy the sister institution ; and if Mr. Gladstone's present sentiments could be taken as a sufficient indication of the sentiments of his party a few years hence, the Church of England would be safe enough from assault. Yet no one can doubt that the " thin end of the wedge " argument, as applied by the opposite party, contains an important truth. Whoever else may be encouraged by the fall of the Irish Church, it is quite certain that the opponents of all establishments will be amongst the number, and they will have obtained a recognition of the important principle that the Church establishment is bound to prove its adaptation to the wants of the people. It is not an independent corporation whose revenues cannot be touched without sacrilege, but simply a body to which Parliament assigns certain revenues for the good of the people at large, with the full understanding that they will be recalled in case of misapplication. The cry of sacrilege has of course been raised, but to very little effect ; and we may anticipate that the Church of England will be henceforth on its trial. The theory of an imprescriptible right to enjoy its revenues and its privileges will be as untenable, after the Irish Church has once been removed, as a similar claim on the part of kings, after Cromwell had given them to know, by a pretty broad hint, that they " had a lith in their necks." Although this claim is extinguished, the Church of England will, it is true, have a much stronger case than its sister church. It is not the church of a minority, nor the church of a conquering people ; so far from its existence conveying a standing insult to any large class of Englishmen, most of them are rather proud of it as an eminently respectable and insular institution. It is true that there are certain difficulties. A large part of the population in different districts — in some, indeed, as in Wales, by much the greater part — is dissenting ; a very large part, again, is serenely indifferent to churches in general ; and there are certain anomalies in the constitution

of the State Church which are not unlikely to attract rough reforms from a democracy, — reforms which may, it is possible, affect the stability of the whole edifice.

It seems, however, not impossible that any serious attack upon the Church of England may be postponed for a long time ; and were it not for certain internal developments, the prospect would be much clearer. The parties which now divide it seem to be daily diverging farther from each other ; and it becomes more difficult to see how they are to be kept together by any hoops or bonds that can be soldered up by Parliamentary ingenuity. The most hopeless differences of opinion divide such men as Dr. Pusey and the Bishop of Oxford from the writers of "Essays and Reviews," and these, again, from the genuine Evangelicals. But this is not all. The most energetic party at the present moment is the Ritualistic ; and it is obvious that their principles are entirely opposed to the theory of a state church. In fact, if the priests rule by divine authority, and the business of the laity is humbly to bow to their decisions (which may be taken as the chief idea of the Ritualist party), nothing can be more absurd than a church whose creed is defined by act of Parliament. Of the other parties, the Evangelicals are so closely allied to the Protestant Dissenters, and the Broad Church is so apt to get altogether outside of orthodox opinions, that their support cannot be implicitly trusted. If one party should succeed in ousting another, the Establishment would become too narrow to claim to represent the nation. The most powerful sentiment in its favor is that of the large class of moderate men who dread above everything a reign of fanaticism. The average layman of cultivation values the Church because it at least provides that an educated man shall be stationed in every parish to exercise some humanizing influence upon the poor. Whatever may be said against them, he feels that the English clergy are at least a hard-working, and, on the whole, an intelligent body of men, whose loss could not easily be supplied. The people without them would be less educated, and in every sense less civilized. He doubts whether a voluntary system would supply their place in this respect. The existing sects of Dissenters are for the most part far more bigoted and less open to modern thought than the compara-

tively cultivated clergy of the Establishment. He is by no means anxious to see a Stiggins in the place of the "scholar and gentleman," as the type of an English clergyman; and, above all, he is profoundly convinced of the necessity that the laity should keep a tight hand upon the vagaries of the clergy. Parliamentary control over the Church has its weak points; but it has also this powerful recommendation, that it prevents the clergy from having things all their own way. The clerical nature is supposed to be tainted by a feminine vehemence and incapacity for business. Left to themselves, the clergy would long ago have torn the Church to pieces. The High and the Low would have combined to oust the Broad, and then the conquerors would have indulged in internecine battle over the spoils. That singularly absurd body, Convocation, shows so fine a talent for committing follies, that men naturally rejoice that its hands are so tightly bound. It is as well to have a phlegmatic parliament and cold-blooded lay judges to keep the peace among the hot-headed parsons. The position of Dr. Colenso is in some respects puzzling; but it gives great satisfaction to the ordinary layman to know that all the fury of bigots cannot touch a hair of his head, so long as he remains within the four corners of a legal decision. Remove these restraints, and the Church would, it is said, infallibly split into three or four discordant sects; the clergy, deprived of their position as state officials, would raise still higher their claims to sacerdotal authority; and instead of the quiet jog-trot of the English Church, where clerical impetuosity is firmly bridled by lay indifference, we should have the incessant shock of hostile sects, each endeavoring to stimulate bigotry to the utmost, and probably alienating the bulk of the nation from all forms of ecclesiastical rule.

We need not examine into the truth of these anticipations; but the temper which they indicate is very common, and accounts for a certain negative support in which the Church of England is still very strong. It is founded not so much upon a positive love to the Church as upon a dread of what might come after it. The average layman watched with a grim smile the spectacle of a Lord Chancellor engaged in "abolishing everlasting damnation" on purely legal grounds, and wondered how

long it would be before the clergy would do that kind office for each other. And yet the weakness of a position which rests rather upon the indifference than upon the zeal of the country is obvious. The Ritualist party, strong in zeal, though strangely feeble in brains, is doing what it can to make the working of a state church impracticable. Whether it splits off Romewards, or prefers to put forward its claims within the bosom of the Church, its theories are entirely irreconcilable with Parliamentary control. The Broad Church party is the only one which brings some positive zeal to the support of a body which, in its eyes, has the enormous merit of wide comprehension, and would dread to lose the support of lay toleration; but the Broad Church party within the Church is numerically small. The progress of the struggle will depend, of course, upon the development of religious opinion in England,—a question far too wide to be considered here. If, as seems probable, the tendency shall in future be to a gradual divergence, to a gravitation of one party in the direction of authority and of the other in the direction of rationalism, it is hard to see how the Church of England can permanently hold its ambiguous position. With an increasing pressure from without, and a diminished cohesion within, the negative support of the moderate party will scarcely be sufficient.

Opinion moves quickly in these days, and the disestablishment of the Irish Church may bring about a more sudden alteration than usual. Yet the Church of England will not be removed from its position in a day, nor probably in a generation. It has struck its roots too deeply into the soil, it is surrounded by too many associations, and it is connected in too many ways with all the most powerful interests of the country to yield its position easily. It is not one act of Parliament that will do the work, but a system of legislation. In the absence, at least, of a violent revolution, the process will not resemble the cutting down of a tree, but the gradual disentanglement of strangely complicated fibres from the soil in which they have been imbedded for centuries. All that can be safely said is, that the signs point to a long series of vigorously disputed battles, in which the supporters and opponents of the principle of a state church will be arrayed on opposite sides. The struggle

must bring about strange complications; for extreme High Churchmen, Protestant Dissenters, and Rationalists agree on widely different grounds in attacking a system which is supported by an equally strange combination; and if the question soon becomes prominent, we may expect to see dislocations of party as curious as that now presented in the Irish question, where Catholics and liberals, instinctively hostile on almost every other point, are now fighting side by side.

The approach of such a struggle is indicated by two or three agitations which have already attracted some notice. For example, the commission lately appointed to consider the Ritualist practices proposes changes, the aim of which is to give the congregations some control over the ceremonial observances in their churches. This is to bring up directly the question of sacerdotal authority, and would invite a conflict between the Ritualist clergy and the laity which must weaken the Church in proportion to its energy. The congregations would in fact say that the revenues of the National Church should not be spent on candles and incense; the clergyman would reply, that he claimed to act by an authority higher than that of the congregation or of Parliament, and no compromise would be logically possible. Another very important series of questions concerns the claim of the clergy to manage the national education. They are being slowly, though surely, ousted from the supreme control of the Universities; every change that has been lately made has been in the direction of diminishing their authority, and their exclusive right to emoluments; and a more sweeping measure will probably be passed in the next session of Parliament. It is, however, in regard to primary education that the position of the clergy is of most importance. Hitherto they have had the merit — and it has been a very great one — of contributing more than any other body to the spread of elementary schools. The country clergyman is almost invariably the main stay of the school in his parish, and not unfrequently contributes a very large part of the expenses from his own pocket. The rich land-owner gives shillings where the poor parson gives pounds, to say nothing of personal superintendence. Whatever gratitude, however, may be due to the clergy, their claims cannot be permitted to endanger the

efficiency of the national system. There has already been a bitter fight over what is known as the "conscience clause," a provision to the effect that money given from the nation in aid of any school should carry with it the condition that the children of parents conscientiously objecting should be excused from attending religious instruction. Though this provision applied only in certain cases, it excited the most vehement opposition from a large part of the clergy. They evidently held it to be the duty of the state to educate children in the principles of the State Church, and thought, that, although, from the weakness of the flesh in modern times, toleration has become a necessity, there should be a certain gentle pressure in favor of Church principles. A large number of modern reformers hold that education should be compulsory, — and most non-clerical reformers, that schools should be provided and supported by some kind of local rate. Whenever these measures are carried out, — and reforms in education are amongst the most necessary and most probable changes, — it is obvious that they will come into direct collision with the claims of the clergy. The Dissenters are to be rated in support of schools; they will of course have a share in the benefits of the schools, and some very stringent conscience clause will infallibly be passed. In this case, the change is from the mediæval theory of leaving education to the desultory efforts of charitable corporations, and the benevolence of individuals under the guidance of the clergy, to the modern system of national organization. Ecclesiastical control is repudiated, not simply as ecclesiastical, but because it implies old-fashioned and systematic methods of supplying the wants of the case.

And here we come in presence of a large number of questions, which must soon receive attention. Mr. Mill said, not long ago, that the great problem of the day was to reconcile democratic government with an effective system of administration. In other words, we have to substitute methods more in harmony with modern ideas for the old social arrangements founded upon feudal principles. It is impossible to turn in any direction, without seeing some application of this truth; and it is the sense of this necessity which has given rise to the general desire for reform, expressed in very different terms by Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Matthew Arnold, and Mr. Harrison, and taking

shape in very different proposals. The freedom of England from revolutions has left the country provided with a social machinery very imperfectly adapted to modern times. Some of it, if a little furbished up and slightly modified, may still do excellent service, and we must only hope that no outburst of democratic impatience will summarily sweep it out of the way, with all its good and its bad together. Some, on the other hand, is manifestly past its work, and must be got rid of as speedily as may be; only the point is past at which simple pulling down is all that is needed, without some process of reconstruction. The state of education is as good an example as any other. The system of primary education, having been chiefly constructed within the last few years, is perhaps tolerable, so far as it goes; the Universities, though incumbered with many antiquated prejudices, are doing much good work and aiming at wider reform. The Colleges, indeed, each with its old traditions and its body of vested interests, oppose a powerful resistance to any rapid changes in the organization of the University. It is difficult to make sweeping reforms in bodies composed of some twenty distinct corporations, each with an independent life of its own, and a strong conservative instinct. But it is in the intermediate part of the system that reform is most imperatively required. The schools which intervene between the primary schools and those intended for the highest classes form, it has been said, a perfect chaos. There are grammar schools, with large foundations, which are so hampered by antiquated restrictions as to have become perfectly useless, and indeed serve chiefly as obstructions in the way of improvement. Some, for example, by offering bad gratuitous instruction, prevent the foundation of better schools of moderate cheapness; others have become simple sinecures; many tend to pauperize their district by distributing instruction at random to a few persons chosen without regard to merit; and without entering into detail, it is enough to say that an excellent commission has lately recorded the opinion that the large endowments are on the whole doing more harm than good. Private enterprise has partly supplied the want, and many excellent schools have been thus provided; but the mass of private schools are still suited only to the most

ignorant prejudices of ignorant parents ; they give a flashy education, and trust to constant advertisements for support. Though Mr. Squeers is supposed to be nearly extinct, his place is filled by a host of quacks, who are apt to crowd out men of merit. There is no security that the wants of any district will be satisfied ; the successful schoolmaster generally uses his reputation to attract boys from a higher and better-paying class ; and thus at any given moment towns or districts may be entirely without any supply of the education most suited to them. There is no plan for graduating schools, nor any such system of inspection as has worked well for the elementary schools. Without going farther, it is enough to say, that, although these deficiencies are not all peculiar to England, they have been specially favored by the *laissez faire* theory, which has been supreme of late. Englishmen, looking at the elaborate systems of France and Prussia, are inclined to trace in the comparative defects of their educational system the cause of their alleged decline in manufacturing excellence, — a reflection which touches them nearly, — and of many other short-comings. They ask whether it is not possible that the state, without diminishing individual energy, and indeed stimulating it by better prospect of success, should reduce this chaos to order, and prevent its better elements from being thrown away by an utter want of co-operation or system. Hitherto it has been content to put in a patch here and tinker a weak place there, but anything like combined and intelligent action has been unknown.

From this instance it would be easy to go on to others. We might speak of the singular system of army administration. The regular army, the volunteer militia, the yeomanry, and the reserves form a dislocated mass which might be welded into an intelligible whole in the time Prussia would take to decide a European war ; or we might remark, that, when English statesmen declare that it is “impossible” to alter the system of purchasing commissions, they simply assert that they do not know how to remove one of the most indefensible of abuses, and tacitly invite some more energetic persons to do it for them. We might point to that curious collection of overgrown villages called London, and ask how long it will take to give three millions of inhabitants a decent system of municipal

government. We might speak of the many resolutions to set about beginning to think of attempting to reduce the jungle of English legislation to some kind of order, and ask when the effort will be seriously made. Or we might inquire about the reforms needed in the poor-law system, and ask when some plan will be hit upon for meeting pauperism more effectually. In the misery of large masses of the population, a misery which decreases slowly, if at all, and is daily in greater contrast with the wealth of the upper classes, there is a constant danger, at which we have only space for a passing hint, though it is perhaps a danger of greater magnitude than any other. It is enough to say, however, that many problems of singular difficulty are awaiting the statesmen of the future; and that, whilst they are not peculiar to England, they are, perhaps, in a more complicated condition there than elsewhere. And we may repeat, that the general nature of the task is to reduce chaos to order, and supply a more simple and direct machinery for the old-fashioned, rusty instruments which once served the turn.

The important question remains, What is the chance that a more democratic Parliament will secure the accomplishment of this task? Will they have the intelligence to find a satisfactory solution of the problems awaiting them, and the courage to grapple with them? It is said that the new Parliament will be composed of the old materials, only that, if anything, wealth will have exercised a greater influence than before. There will be more rich soap-boilers, and fewer young nobles. It would, indeed, have been foolish to expect any sudden breach of continuity. Parliament has still the same charms for the upper classes; and wealth and social position, not having lost their influence within six months, would certainly conduct their possessors within the sacred walls. Yet it seems safe to anticipate, that, even in this Parliament, and certainly in its successors, there will be a considerable change in the spirit of legislation. The discussion of wider questions will itself encourage a more decided policy. A Parliament which begins by assaulting so respectable a body as the Irish Church will, so to speak, have tasted blood; it will have less veneration for the sacred and imprescriptible rights of corporations. Moreover, it will have

behind it a public opinion which is no longer determined in a preponderating degree by the safe and cautious instinct of the middle classes. The shop-keepers, who held that the worst of all evils was a shock to trade, will no longer be supreme. A period of social upheaving, a questioning of all established principles, and the consequent confusion of some venerable humbugs of long standing and reputation, are extremely probable. Perhaps the greatest danger is, that, in the struggle for political power, matters of still greater importance may be neglected. We may witness other sessions like that of 1868, occupied entirely with endless talk about matters long ago decided in the mind of every candid person, to the exclusion of practical reforms. If Parliament insists, as it has been too much inclined to do, on taking upon itself functions for which it is singularly incompetent, and discussing the minutest details of matters which should be left to executive bodies, much-needed reforms may be indefinitely postponed. Rejoicing in its omnipotence, that august assembly sometimes insists upon leaving nothing to be done by anybody else, — with the natural result, that, after a spasmodic effort at doing an enormous amount of business, it does a quarter very imperfectly and leaves the rest undone. It is for English radicals to show that a popular government can rise above mere party, and translate great principles into action, without frittering away its energies in an indefinite number of petty squabbles. And there is this ground for hope, that there has not for years been a time when so many reforms of surpassing interest were being actively discussed, and by men of genuine ability. We will hope better than that the impulse which has been communicated to the national intellect should end in a mere Parliamentary dead-lock and a useless wrangle for power.

Meanwhile we may anticipate that amongst the leading questions for some time will be those bearing upon Church matters and upon education. It is in them that there is the sharpest contrast between the old and the modern methods of action. Other administrative reforms will create less bitterness, and may be decided with less political excitement. But there is one other question, which has hardly come into the foreground, but which may be expected to rise into prominence at

some future day. The Irish Church question will, as we expect, introduce an agitation about its English sister. But behind the Irish Church lies the question of Irish tenure of land; and it is scarcely to be doubted, that, by a similar transition, an agitation about land in Ireland may lead to a discussion upon land in England. The rapid accumulation of landed estates is preparing many difficulties; and if ever a democratic legislature undertakes to deal with such questions, we may expect a struggle of a more serious character than upon any previous issue. We may indeed repeat, once more, that prophesying is dangerous; but it is certainly possible that within a few years the democracy may find itself grappling with a more difficult problem than any which now lies before it. Meanwhile political observers may find sufficient interest in the preliminary contests which must occur, and which will decide whether the English nation is to be quoted as a warning or an encouragement to the democracies of the future: for one thing is plain, namely, that the result of Mr. Disraeli's bill was to give the power substantially to that class of which he and his party had most elaborately demonstrated the unfitness. We hope that they may disappoint his prophecies of 1866, and fulfil those of 1867, by showing, that, with less respect for some of the ancient idols whose worship has hitherto obstructed bold legislation, they are yet capable of following the guidance of the cultivated intellect and talent of the country. New forces have been summoned into play to break up the deadlock from which England has been suffering. In spite of the forebodings of conservatives and cynics, we may hope that able and patriotic statesmen, in which no country is richer than England, will be able to govern their application and direct them to the accomplishment of worthy objects. Nor, if those statesmen have the courage to accept what is inevitable, instead of blindly opposing all change, does there seem any reason to doubt their capacity for holding their position at the head of affairs.

LESLIE STEPHEN.